

157
P

We
fight
on...

SLOVAK RISING IN
THE GERMAN REAR

SC

WE FIGHT ON...

SLOVAK RISING IN THE GERMAN REAR

BY

J. B. MURAN

With Compliments to
N.N. Raine
Secretary C.S.V.
Warrington



LINCOLNS-PRAGER (PUBLISHERS) LIMITED
LONDON

MS No: 6087

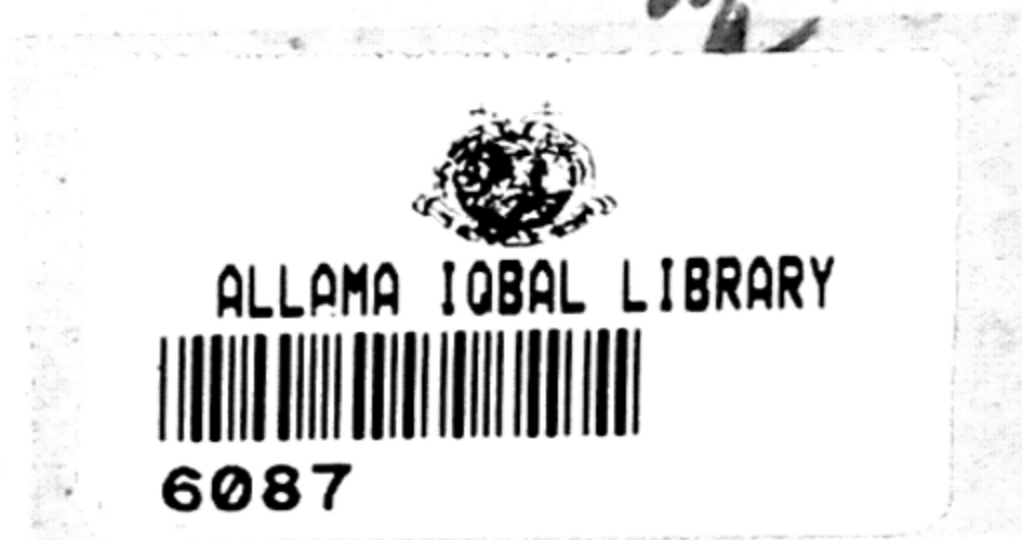
[Handwritten signature]

ST

[Handwritten signature]

CHECKED

CHECKED BY



947

[scribble]
M 931 W

WE FIGHT ON . . .

SLOVAK PATRIOTS RISE : BEHIND THE SCENES

THE Moscow correspondent of *The Times*, writing about the events in Slovakia relates the following touching episode : "One Czech airman described his homecoming as follows : 'We arrived on Sunday, the day on which Slovaks rarely work, but found the airfield crowded with thousands of volunteers who brought shovels, horses, and oxen to level the ground. As our aircraft bore Soviet markings we were at first taken for Russians. An old man came towards us with a huge bunch of flowers. Then he saw my cap-badge. "Ours, ours," he shouted, and the whole crowd took up the cry and ran towards us shouting, singing and weeping. . . ."'*

This little episode shows, I think, more than many speeches and theses the trend that underlies the rising of the Slovak people. Six years ago the Germans tore the Czechoslovak Republic asunder, annexed the western provinces of Bohemia-Moravia and created an "independent" Slovak State which was meant to be a model showing the benefits of the New Germanic Order in Europe. By giving them the right to print their own bank-notes, their stamps and to maintain diplomatic representatives at other puppet Governments the Germans thought that they would induce a small people to believe that these pretences—behind which a large-scale robbery of the national wealth was going on—were real national independence and freedom.

The Germans were wrong. As events have shown, an overwhelming majority of the Slovak people never became convinced that Hitler's gift of independence was anything but a Trojan horse.

But the fact was—and at the time of writing still is—that both parts of the Republic—the Czech and the Slovak—and both people are separated by the barrier of a new frontier, guarded from both sides by the S.S. and the Gestapo. The political conditions of both parts, the so-called Protectorate

* *The Times*, No. 46,983, Oct. 28th, 1944.

and the so-called independent Slovak Republic, are as different as they can be. Oppression in the Protectorate, with the Gestapo in full control, is immeasurably heavier than in Slovakia, where the Germans, up to August 1944, exercised their control only indirectly. Therefore the conditions of the struggle are different.

But the new barrier and six years of different rule and intense propaganda did not change anything in the outlook of the people on both sides of the new frontier. On the contrary, observers of public opinion, who have lived till quite recently in the country, state that the spirit of brotherhood and common destiny of Czechs and Slovaks was never deeper felt in Slovakia than during these years of separation. The Slovaks showed this spirit in a very practical way soon after the occupation of Bohemia-Moravia by the Germans. Then, many thousands of Czechs were fleeing the country to join the army abroad. After the fall of Poland the only possible way out was through Slovakia. What simple Slovak peasants and workers have done to aid these fugitives will be always remembered by them. And not seldom the Slovaks went away with them, to join the Czechoslovak army abroad.

In the next chapter we shall see what happened to the Slovak army, which the Quislings and the Germans were foolish enough to send to the Eastern front. The remnants of that force had to be recalled and, on the orders of the Germans, the Quislings started to raise a new army. But not only did the call up of fresh forces go very badly, something much worse happened. When, on August 29th, the Germans entered the country, the whole Slovak army, with only a few exceptions, rose against the Government, which had to declare the entire Slovak army as dissolved—a declaration which, of course, amounted practically to nothing, since almost the entire army was up in arms against their Quislings. And this army immediately renewed its oath to the Czechoslovak Republic, remaining true to the spirit of the rising and of the preceding six years of struggle.

But before all this happened a great deal of preparatory work had to be done in both the military and the political fields. The political basis of the rising was laid, after long discussions, at Christmas 1943. Then a secret meeting of the representatives of all underground groups in Slovakia took place. There were leading members of the Slovak army,

representatives of all political trends amongst the middle classes and the peasantry, representatives of the Communist and Socialist parties, trade unionists, etc. They all agreed on a political platform, which became the unifying bond of all sections of the liberation movement. A resolution was carried, which expressed the will of the entire people to fight for liberation and the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic. It was also agreed that this national campaign should be led by the Slovak National Council, which would comprise representatives of all political groups participating in the struggle. This, in fact, happened after the fighting had begun ; and the National Council, as will be shown in the last chapter, fulfilled its tasks with great success.

The Slovak National Council was elected at this conference and recognized by all the representatives of the resistance groups, as well as by those who were unable to be present, as the supreme organ of the movement.

At once the National Council began its work of organisation. The development of the war in relation to Slovakia pointed clearly towards two alternatives. (1) The Red army in their thrust to the Carpathians might reach the passes leading into Slovakia and the Danubian basin before the Germans would be able to occupy the country. (2) The German army, not trusting the Slovak forces, might invade Slovakia in order to occupy the vital communications and to fortify and defend the Carpathian passes.

After a thorough examination of all possibilities and circumstances the military leaders and the National Council decided : whichever of these two eventualities should occur, the army and the whole people should begin a general armed insurrection with the aim of driving out the German invaders from the whole of Czechoslovakia. It was also agreed to prepare all military and administrative measures so that if and when the Red army reached the Carpathian passes, the Slovak divisions there would clear their way, while the divisions in the west of the country and the armed forces of the people would hold up the expected German invasion from the West. In case the German army should try to invade Slovakia before the Red army had reached the Carpathian passes, all Slovak units and the whole people should contain the Germans and defend the mountain fortresses in Central Slovakia until Allied help arrived.

As it happened, the second plan had to be put into operation.

For sixty days Czechoslovak forces and the people's army held large areas. When, however, the Germans, hard pressed by the Russians advancing from Transylvania and Hungary, had to clear the way for an orderly retreat along the Slovak railways, they sent elements of three of their best armoured divisions : the "Prinz Eugen," the "Deutschland" and "Das Reich," to reinforce the four divisions they already had in Slovakia, and it was only then that they succeeded in driving the patriotic forces into the mountains.

The military and political plans of the Slovak patriots were at once submitted to the Czechoslovak Government in London, with whom the military and political leaders were of course, always in contact, and through the Government the Allies were fully informed.

In Slovakia, meanwhile the preparations were begun with speed and efficiency. Some members of the Slovak insurrection movement held very important posts at the Slovak Ministry of National Defence and were, therefore, able very effectively to fulfil orders given by the National Council. It cannot be disclosed yet, in detail, how they worked, but it can be said that they did everything to prepare the Slovak army for a concerted rising. The preparations were so detailed that officers known to be collaborating with the Nazis were sent to places where they could do no harm. Orders were given to concentrate all military stocks of aircraft, fuel—amounting to hundreds of thousands of gallons of petrol—military equipment, weapons and ammunition and most of the technical and specialised units in certain garrisons. The command of the militarily organised *gendarmerie* was also transferred to where it would be most useful and its detachments were secretly advised that in the case of a foreign invasion they should at once join the guerillas and military units in the struggle against the invader.

Other patriots and supporters of the National Council held very important economic posts. Under the pretext that stocks of food and other necessities must be safeguarded against the Allied bombings, they concentrated most of these stocks where they would be easily accessible to the patriot forces. Even gold and paper money were so placed as to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Germans. Furthermore, an iron reserve of flour, salt, sugar and other foodstuffs had been built up compulsorily in all localities for two months, in case "the communications should break down."

It seems almost incredible that all this could have been done without the Quislings or the Germans being able to notice anything. There is one—only partial—explanation for this, namely, that in Slovakia even many apparent collaborationists were not what they seemed to be.

Meanwhile, in the eastern, central and northern parts of the country a great concentration of guerilla forces took place, about whose activities we shall have more to say in the following chapter. Thousands of Slovak workers, who refused to go for compulsory work to Germany, soldiers who had deserted from the army of the Slovak Quislings, Slovak deserters from the Hungarian army, men who were coming back from fighting with the Soviet guerillas, Slovak and Czech patriots who had escaped from the clutches of the Gestapo, and many others were forming guerilla units, and in this they were helped by the local population.

As the summer progressed events were quickly coming to a head. From the North, the East and the South the Soviet forces were battling their way towards Slovakia. In the night of the 28th of August the German army, which had been concentrated on the western borders of the country, began to march into Slovakia. The National Council issued its orders to all garrisons, *gendarmerie* posts, local national committees, loyal civil servants, to all peasants and workers, to the whole nation :

The day has come !

And so the Slovak national insurrection began. As the first shots were exchanged and the first Germans paid with their lives, Czechoslovak forces and guerilla units took their oath to fight until the whole country from the Carpathians and the Tatras to the Bohemian Forest should be liberated, and in the town of Banska Bystrica, in Central Slovakia, the resurrection of the Czechoslovak Republic was proclaimed. The liberation of the long-suffering people of Czechoslovakia had started on Slovak soil.

THE PEOPLE'S WAR

*He came from the hills and struck at the enemy
To free his people from the shackles of blasphemy
The partisan. . . .*

(From the song of the Slovak guerillas)

ALMOST every country in the world has its story of a popular hero, who took away from the rich and gave to the poor, a rebel against the existing bad order of cruelty and oppression, who fought for justice for his people. But not everywhere has this story survived and retained its popular appeal as it has in Slovakia.

A simple and unsophisticated people lives in its valleys and on its hills, a hard-working people which loves songs and ballads, a people which cherishes its popular heroes. And so, in many places in Slovakia, the memory of Juraj Janosik still lives as though he himself had lived yesterday. It is the story of a man, who "took away from the rich and gave to the poor, who fought the wrong and defended the truth," as one beautiful poem has it.

And now this tradition came to life again. With the appearance of the guerillas, who took up the fight against the Germans to deliver their country and to make it free, the Janosik tradition came to life again. The people from the hills where the legendary hero lived were amongst the first to rise when the Germans came to occupy their country.

But while all these past memories which are still so much alive play their part, the present struggle in Slovakia has nothing to do with anything as romantic as the ballad of Juraj Janosik.

It is a life and death struggle of an entire people against a still very powerful enemy. Juraj Janosik, in the eighteenth century, fought alone with a dozen or so of his "boys from the hills," until he was captured by Magyar henchmen and executed. But today a whole people of farmers, factory workers and students is up in arms to fight for independence and freedom.

In 1942-43 the Slovak Quisling Government sent two Slovak divisions to the eastern front, to fight with the Germans against the Soviet forces. It is not known to us what illusions the Slovak Quislings and the Germans had as to the reliability

of these troops. The fact is that wherever possible those Slovak soldiers, who remained true to the Czechoslovak Republic, went over to the Russians, singly, in groups or in whole regiments, in order to join the Czechoslovak army. Where this was not possible Slovak soldiers joined the Russian guerillas. They helped them to fight the Germans in White Russia, in the Ukraine, in the Crimea, and their participation in the liberation of Odessa is one of the great stories of this war, which still remains to be written.

Thus many Slovak soldiers went through what one of them described in a free Slovak paper as "a high-school of guerilla art," and when the fighting in their own country started, they were able to act as instructors of the masses who joined the fight.

The guerilla movement in Slovakia grew up gradually, long before the large-scale rising really started. The first small groups of partisans came to life as early as 1943. They were the expression of the people's wish to take part in the struggle against the Germans and to contribute themselves to their liberation. This desire actuated all the military and political actions of the Slovak insurrection. True, later on, the people's struggle became one of self-defence against German atrocities. But the chief factor was and always remained the desire to end once and for all with the traitors who sold the country to the Germans and to re-establish their freedom in the Czechoslovak Republic.

Nominally, Slovakia was not a German-occupied country, save only its western borderland where the Germans had built a powerful defence system on the frontier of the so-called Protectorate Bohemia-Moravia. But when, in the early summer of 1944, the Russians began their sweeping advance towards the West, and began to threaten Rumania and Transylvania, more and more German troops were either sent to Eastern Slovakia to guard the Carpathian passes, or were moving across the network of the strategically important Slovak railways to the north or south-east.

These military movements presented the Slovak guerillas, who were just then forming themselves into small and often independent groups, with their first opportunities for hampering and damaging German communications. But very soon another incentive—sheer self-defence—accelerated their activities.

The German ruffians behaved in the "allied" Slovakia

with the same arrogance and ruthlessness as in every other occupied country. They broke into the houses of peaceful citizens, threatened their womenfolk with violence, they stole anything they could lay their hands on, and displayed all the qualities which made the Germans the most hated people of all time.

Here are a few examples of the German behaviour some time before the uprising of the Slovak people began.

On the 20th of March, 1944, a motorised transport of the German infantry on their way to Hungary stopped in the Slovak village of Sabinov. Immediately the German soldiers began to terrorise the village. They broke into the local inn and with rifles and revolvers in their hands they forced the inn-keeper to hand over beer, wines and spirits. Intoxicated, the German soldiers then broke into the houses of many local citizens. They forced their way into the house of a Jewish citizen, where they found only his wife and two children, a boy of 5 years and a girl of $2\frac{1}{2}$ years old. They committed an unspeakable and bestial act of violence upon the small girl and maltreated the woman, who was expecting a child. Another group of soldiers broke into the bedroom of the citizen F. and threatened his wife and his daughters with violence. Many other women and girls became victims of these drunken Germans that night. A touch of humour to this tragedy was provided by two German drunkards who, after considerable exertions, broke into the local jail, which was empty of everything they could steal and even of prisoners.

On the 10th of June many shots were fired from a German troop train at workmen working on the railway line near the station of Olenava and many people were injured.

On the 24th of July a German troop train going to Hungary drew up at the station of Vajnory, in Western Slovakia. German soldiers broke into the poor dwellings of workers, stole all their scanty possessions, even their small supplies of potatoes, which was the only food left to the workers. Having done this they completely destroyed the huts and departed to deploy their cultural activities elsewhere.

* * * * *

These are just a few instances taken at random, episodes which happened at a time when Slovakia, at least nominally, was still looked upon by Berlin as an ally. Later on in this

chapter we shall have to say something more about the German atrocities committed after open fighting had broken out.

So the beginnings of the guerilla warfare in Slovakia were as much a defensive as an offensive action. Both actions were, of course, intermingled and interdependent, as every offensive action brought fresh reprisals by the Germans and these reprisals in their turn led to more acts of self-defence.

As the months went by and the Russian front came nearer to the borders of Czechoslovakia the activities of the guerilla forces widened. From the beginning of 1944 the Slovak guerillas steadily increased their activities. Clashes with the quisling forces occurred, the guerillas seized weapons and ammunition and disappeared, to appear elsewhere, to strike and to vanish again into the blue. More and more men were taking to the hills and forests of Slovakia and guerilla groups on Slovak soil very often made contact with guerilla forces fighting in the Carpathian Ukraine (Ruthenia), the easternmost province of Czechoslovakia, or with the partisans in the Bezkydy mountains, in the so-called Protectorate Bohemia-Moravia. News of their activities began to arrive regularly in London. Now they appeared in Eastern Slovakia, now in the West, now in the Centre, always descending like lightning from the mountains and retiring again, after their task had been completed.

The Red army entered Rumania and was fighting hard slogging battles in the difficult approaches to the Carpathian passes, leading into Czechoslovakia. Tension in Slovakia was gradually mounting to a fever pitch and the quisling Government was following events with grave fears and apprehensions.

On the 8th of April, 1944, Soviet and Czechoslovak forces reached the easternmost point of the Republic, in the Carpathians. At the same time, guerilla activities became more lively. Soldiers of the Slovak army were deserting to join the guerillas, clashes occurred in almost every part of the country between the people and such few officials as still remained faithful to the quisling Government. The regimented governmental press began now to reflect the nervousness of the quislings and complained of the "disorder and insecurity" created in the country by the people's forces. On April 20th an urgent conference of all State Security branches was summoned by the quisling Government; at

the same time the German minority in Slovakia was mobilised, and courses for commanders and instructors of the German "F.S." (a counterpart of the S.S. in Germany) were started. Several days later Hitler called the puppet President Tiso and told him to prepare for more sacrifices for the German war and to secure order in his own country which had become "a hotbed of unrest," threatening the German rear.

But instead of Tiso's being able to "secure order," things became worse and worse. A factory, manufacturing cloth for the German army in Zilina was burned down. Grave sabotage occurred in the Bratislava dynamite factory. Railway tracks were damaged, bridges and tunnels blown up, paralysing the most vital German communication with the crumbling Rumanian front. Quislings and Germans throughout the country were attacked.

On July 27th the quisling Government had to admit openly that there were strong guerilla groups in the country.

Five days later the guerillas struck and fought their first major action. This happened on 1st August at the railway station of the village of Hanusovce, in Eastern Slovakia. A larger unit of an S.S. division was sent there from Hungary to create a defensive line against the Russian threat from the Sanok-pass in the north. As the German soldiers were leaving the train, the guerillas, who had occupied strategic positions around the station, began to attack the Germans with rifles and machine-guns. The battle lasted almost two days and the guerillas inflicted heavy losses upon the enemy before they withdrew.

Twelve days later the quisling Government had to proclaim martial law in a vain effort to "restore order."

It proved impossible to "restore order," where the whole people was rising to destroy the corrupt and hated quisling regime. The people rose and it was something like a natural event, a storm, which could not be controlled once it began. People simply had had enough and they began to show it on a national scale in a very unmistakable way, shooting such Germans as came across their way.

The quisling Government sent a punitive expedition against the guerilla forces. But instead of fighting them, the soldiers fraternised with the partisans and returned with the report that they hadn't met any guerillas. The Germans, however, were already full of suspicion. They sent an S.S. unit which captured a couple of guerillas in a battle and took them off

in a lorry. But another group of guerillas waited in ambush, attacked the lorry and freed the captives.

* * * * *

This state of things could not be tolerated by the Germans, who were well aware of the strategical importance of Slovakia. They decided to occupy the country and they were confident that they would succeed in doing so within forty-eight hours, as the German official spokesman declared on September 1st.

They started to occupy the country on August 28th, and this was the signal for an armed uprising not only of the army, but of the entire people. The guerilla movement swept like a fire throughout the country and everywhere people volunteered for its ranks. A typical example is recorded in the Slovak newspaper *Pravda*.

"A man entered our office. 'I am seventy-five years old,' he introduced himself. 'I have come to volunteer for the armed forces. If I could kill, maybe, even two Germans, my soul would go much easier to heaven.'"

Such was the spirit of these people who were fighting in the hills and valleys of their country. They were fighting well and their actions were no longer unco-ordinated, as they often were when guerilla-warfare was beginning to take shape. The new authority of free Slovakia, the Slovak National Council, working in close collaboration with the Czechoslovak Government in London, swiftly brought the guerilla forces under effective control when, on October 16th, a general staff of the Slovak guerillas was created and all the armed forces of the people were united under one command. This became necessary chiefly because of the wide range and the importance of the guerilla warfare. For the nature of fighting in Slovakia was such that the activities of the guerillas were almost as important as the fighting on the regular front line. The guerillas, with their typical elastic warfare and their tip-and-run tactics, were everywhere hampering the German communications, the bringing up of troops from the rear to the front line and, above all, giving not inconsiderable help to the Red army and the Czechoslovak army corps, which were already battling in the Carpathian passes.

* * * * *

A typical example of this help is given in an account of the activities of the guerilla group "Chapayev," operating in Eastern Slovakia.*

This group, consisting of several thousand men, who had armed themselves gradually by taking arms away from the Germans, harassed the German forces in the Carpathians in many ways. They repeatedly destroyed their telephone



HITLER'S HUMANITY.

(From the grim humour of the guerillas).

lines, they attacked motorised German convoys in the mountains, killing the guards, destroying the cars, for which they had no use, and carrying away supplies and ammunition. With the help of local workers they blew up a new and

*We are quoting Slovak newspapers, which were publishing many accounts of the guerilla-activities. About the heroic deeds of the regular Czechoslovak army which was fighting against overwhelming odds little was written at that time; for military reasons, details of military operations by the regular army will be known later. Therefore we are dealing mostly with the guerillas in this chapter.

important cable-line leading through the Dukla-pass. When the Germans came to repair it, the guerillas killed the whole detachment of German engineers and soldiers.

* * * * *

The partisans were well supplied by the population of the small villages and they were never caught, although the inhabitants of the whole area knew of their whereabouts.

As soon as open fighting broke out and the guerilla activities were co-ordinated, a plan of guerilla training camps was put into action. Every day new volunteers flocked into these camps. Their declarations of loyalty were as simple as were the words of that seventy-five-year-old worker, "I am not too young to fight. I don't know yet how to deal with weapons, but you will teach me." Or, "I fought in the old Austrian army. Then I became a soldier of the Czechoslovak Legion in the first World War. And now I think that I am not too old to fight again for the liberation of my country." Or, "I want to fight. And I would like to meet Stalin and Churchill when it is all over. I want to shake hands with them."

The training of the guerillas in these special camps was, however, rather different from the normal army training. The volunteer had, firstly, to get thoroughly acquainted with the weapon with which he had to fight, and, secondly, to undergo an exacting training in the terrain under the guidance of a trained guerilla officer in whose company the volunteer would fight from then on. Thus a deep feeling of comradeship was created from the first day of the training, and, moreover, the commander came to know well the assets and deficiencies of each man in his unit.

Strict order and discipline were the main features of all these camps. From early in the morning till dusk the training went on and in the evening the future guerillas discussed political questions of the day and, before going to bed, they usually sang their beautiful songs. For the Slovaks, like all Slavonic people, are very fond of community singing, and, like all Slavonic nations, they are very good at it.

And they fought as well as they sang. With courage, resourcefulness and tenacity, helped by their thorough knowledge of their beautiful mountainous country and backed, of course, by the local population, who acted as scouts, spies,

and suppliers, hiding and tending the wounded and helping in a hundred other possible ways. They were truly a people's army, these "boys from the hills," as the people fondly call them.

* * * * *

As the open fighting in Slovakia progressed, the Germans, enraged by the stubborn defence of the Czechoslovak forces and the Slovak patriots, committed innumerable atrocities.

In the town of Zilina, which was given up and then taken back by the guerillas, the Germans executed hundreds of men and women and they didn't even stop at murdering small children, whom they first baited with chocolates and then shot in cold blood. They also sent whole waggon-loads of young people to Germany.

The villages of Solna Bana and Hnilcik were burnt down and all their inhabitants were killed.

In another place seventy-two captured partisans were shot as a reprisal for the death of a German commander, who fell in an open skirmish.

In the village of Batovany, 150 men, women and children were killed and buried in a pit. The girls' hostel of the Bata factory was turned into a German army brothel.

The Germans not only murdered innocent people, but often they fought in a cowardly fashion. In the towns of Presov and Kezmarok they assembled the civil population and under their cover advanced against the strong points of the liberation forces. Very often, too, they put on Slovak army uniforms to deceive their enemy.

All these instances, and there are many, many more which we do not quote for lack of space, are a new and terrible indictment of the German people. They are recorded and their perpetrators, if they remain alive, will be brought to justice.

But there are many who will not be alive when the time of the rendering of justice arrives. The German cruelty fanned the fighting spirit of the Slovak people to a red hot fury. The army of liberation and the guerilla forces became an army of revenge and just retribution. The war against the Germans became more than hitherto a personal affair of each fighter. Many Slovaks had not come into direct contact with the Germans before and they might have viewed the

DEKLARÁCIA

SLOVENSKEJ NÁRODNEJ RADY.

Všetky demokratické a pokrokové složky a směry slovenského národa, ktoré viedly neustály boj proti doterajšiemu fašistickému režimu na Slovensku a proti jeho nacistickým nemeckým spojencom, utvorily dnešného dňa SLOVENSKÚ NÁRODNU RADU ako vrcholný orgán domáceho slovenského odboja.

Preto SLOVENSKÁ NÁRODNÁ RADA, ako jedine oprávnená hovoriť v mene slovenského národa preberá dnešným dňom na celom SLOVENSKU zákonodárnu a výkonnú moc, ako i obranu SLOVENSKA a túto moc bude vykonávať do tých čias, kým si slovenský národ demokratickým spôsobom neurčí legitímnych zástupcov.

Naš domáci odboj tak, ako bol dosiaľ vedený v úplnej shode s československým zahraničným odbojom chce i naďalej v jednote a spolupráci priviesť náš boj k víťazstvu.

Sme za bratské spolužitie s českým národom v novej československej republike. Ustavoprávne, sociálne, hospodárske a kultúrne otázky republiky budú vzájomnou dohodou definitívne usporiadané zvolenými zástupcami slovenského a českého ľudu v duchu demokratických zásad, pokroku a sociálnej spravodlivosti.

Popri politickom oslobodení, našim cieľom je zaistiť krajší a šťastný život sociálne slabým vrstvám národa, menovite slovenskému robotníkovi a roľníkovi. V záujme zvýšenia životnej úrovne národa sme za spravodlivé rozdelenie národného dôchodku, za novú úpravu vlastníctva a držby pôdy na prospech malých roľníkov. Robotník nech má mzdu, primeranú zvýšenej úrovni a podiel na výsledku svojej práce.

Co najrozhodnejšie odmietame a odsudzujeme protidemokratické a násilnícke výčiny a názory ľudáckeho režimu u nás. Slovenský národ nemal nič spoločného so spojenectvom s hitlerovským Nemeckom. Naopak celým svojim myšľaním a presvedčením bol vždy na strane spojencov, čo pri každej vhodnej príležitosti doma i na fronte potvrdil skutkami. Slovenský národ v súlade s našimi národnými tradíciami rozhorčene odmietol tiso-vsko-tukovsku zradu na slovanstve, ktorou ľudácky režim hnal slovenský národ do boja proti bratskému národu ruskému a ostatným slovan-ským národom.

Dnešným dňom slovenský národ manifestačne pripojuje sa k spojeneckým národom, ktoré svojím bojom a veľkými obeťami zabezpečujú slobodný a demokratický život národom celého sveta a tak i nášmu malému národu. Všetkými silami chceme prispieť k rýchlemu skončeniu tohoto zápasu o slobodu.

V týchto delinných chvíľach poskytneme každú mravnú a hmotnú pomoc našej slovenskej bojujúcej armáde a partizanom. Voláme celý národ do zbrane a do boja proti našim odvekým nepriateľom a ich tónajším príslu- hovačom, aby všetci Slováci mohli si v slobodnej Československej republike zariadiť život podľa svojej vôle.

Nech žije naša spravodlivá vec!

Sláva Československej republike!

Banská Bystrica dňa 1. septembra 1944.

Slovenská Národná Rada.

DECLARATION OF THE SLOVAK NATIONAL COUNCIL.

CZECHOSLOVAK
SOLDIERS OF FREEDOM
ERECTING A
FRONTIER POST NEAR
THE DUKLA PASS.



PUTTING UP A STREAMER
TO BID WELCOME TO
THE RED ARMY.



war rather impersonally as a necessary and just fight for the ideals of freedom and independence, for the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic. But now it became an urgent personal matter, the German adversary became a hated human being as such, and not merely a symbol of a hated and evil regime, which had brought so many miseries upon the world. And so the partisans became a terrible and feared enemy.

"After the village of Telgart had been liberated, our unit was moved further to the east," relates a member of the guerilla-brigade "Janosik." "But we couldn't find any Germans and so we decided that the mountain should go to Mohammed. There were some motorised German convoys moving around and our commander decided to attack them on September 21st. For three full days the boys cleaned their rifles and machine-guns and counted their grenades and ammunition. At last, we were on our way. We had to wait for the rendezvous and we got very impatient. At last four German lorries appeared. A volley of shots . . . more shots . . . The lorries were full of Germans and in a short while they were half empty. The Germans who remained in the lorries were dead Germans, the others were just running Germans. They ran as fast as they could. When we had finished with the lorries we started to withdraw. But for the Germans the end had not come yet. They began shelling us from the rear. But we silently disappeared and the other day we found out that the Germans were shelling each other till midnight. In the morning they took away their dead and wounded on lorries and we looked on from the ambush.

The other platoon was very jealous of our success and so the commander gave them permission to try their luck. And weren't they lucky! Of four lorries they destroyed one completely, damaged another and 32 dead and 16 injured German soldiers remained on the field. We had no losses.

After that the Germans didn't dare any more to show up on the highway and so our commander decided to attack the village of Vondrisel, which they had occupied. We attacked on September 30th at midnight and the Germans, when they saw that they had to do with guerillas, disappeared quickly from the village without having fired more than perhaps ten shots. We got plenty of guns and ammunition and destroyed all the heavier German equipment that we couldn't carry away."

From other reports on guerilla activities we quote :

“During the fighting for the town of Turcansky Svaty Martin the guerilla A.S., without regard for his personal danger caught unexploded German hand-grenades and threw them back into the German positions, where they destroyed many Germans.”

“A group of six guerillas saw a platoon of twenty-six Germans, who were coming to occupy the village of C. They waited until the Germans came near and then they began to shoot with machine-guns and automatic rifles. The Germans fled, leaving 2,800 pieces of ammunition and many hand-grenades behind.”

“A German detachment occupied a large village, which we had to give up. The village was empty of inhabitants. The Germans thought that they were secure and so they sent three large lorries with supplies and ammunition ahead of them. But they didn't count with the guerillas. A small group of them took up positions at the fringe of the village and waited for the Germans. Suddenly they saw three German lorries. The order to fire was given and what followed is hard to describe. The Germans tried to run away. They left the lorries and ran in circles like mad, trying to find cover. But the shots came from all sides. Finally those who didn't remain on the field managed to run away. Our boys sprang into the lorries and brought all of them, full of welcome supplies, to the guerillas.”

* * * * *

But the guerillas had their most spectacular success one day before the insurrection began, on August 27th. In the station of Turcansky Svaty Martin a group of guerillas stopped a train with a waggon-load of high German staff officers, who were on their way to Rumania, with General Ott at their head. They captured them and brought them into the military barracks in the town. The guerillas did not intend to harm them, but, next day, when they were brought into the courtyard an S.S. officer suddenly drew his gun and began to shoot at the guards. In the shooting which ensued twenty-seven high German staff officers were killed.

* * * * *

Sometimes instances of grim humour are recorded, in the midst of the fighting. So it happened near the village of Tvrdošín, that the Germans came to a guerilla-held line with a broadcasting-car, trying to persuade the guerillas by propaganda and sentimental music to stop fighting and give themselves up ! The guerillas listened for a while and then they replied with their version of propaganda—with rifles and machine-guns. A skirmish ensued, at the end of which several Germans remained dead on the field and the guerillas seized the broadcasting car, including propaganda records and three rather scared German captives.



HITLER PRAYS FOR PEACE.
(From the grim humour of the guerillas).

For another example of a similar kind we quote the reporter of a Slovak newspaper. "It is dark, our commander enters the room. 'No, I don't want any dinner, thank you,' he says. 'I have dined outside with the boys. And we have fed the Germans together. I don't think they liked it, though. Just imagine,' he continues, 'the Germans in Hranovnice started to play football and we stopped them before half-time. I climbed the observation tower and saw them running after the ball, the b—— b——. I have a sportsman's blood myself,

I play football too, so I say to the gunner : " Let them have two or three good shots, the Kamerads. Score a goal ! " And bang it goes from the cannon, one two, three. After that third shot not a single b——y German remained on the field. It was 3—0 for us, I guess.' "

But not only men, women too, were fighting with the partisans. Here, as one example, is the story of Martha, the guerilla-fighter.

Martha was not yet seventeen years old. She joined the guerillas to avenge her father, who was put into the concentration camp of Illava for his uncompromising anti-fascist attitude. Little Martha joined the partisans in summer this year and together with many other women she took part in many fights against the enemy. She was armed with an automatic rifle, which, in her hands, has accounted for several Germans. Martha is very courageous and together with her older friend, a Czech woman whose husband was murdered by the Germans, they never failed to go where the fight is hardest. Martha was slightly wounded near Strecno, but she hoped to be in action very soon again.

From an interview with another guerilla-girl : " We are just coming back from the fight. We fought from seven till twelve and we had to retire because we ran short of ammunition. It's a pity. But anyway, they lost more dead than we did. We shall reorganise now and soon we shall fight again."

* * * * *

An interesting feature of the guerillas is that they contain a fair number of Jews. There were, at the outbreak of the fighting, about 40,000 Jews, who were left in Slovakia. The first act of the National Council was to open the concentration camps where most of these people lived and to set them free. Many of them have taken up arms and are serving either in the army or fighting as guerillas. There is at least one all-Jewish guerilla unit in Slovakia and, according to the testimony of the people who came from over there, they, too, are fighting well.

Amongst the guerillas are, moreover, peoples of many other nationalities, who joined the fight as soon as it broke out. There are Russian, French and Yugoslav prisoners of war, who were either in the country, or who came from the neighbouring countries when the fight started.

"I have spoken," reports the war correspondent of the Slovak newspaper *Cas*, with a French guerilla, a 17 year old boy. He was captured by the Germans, beaten by the S.S. and forced to do heavy labour. Together with some of his comrades he ran away and they wanted to join Marshal Tito's army in Yugoslavia. They were, however, caught in Hungary and interned. When they heard that there was an armed uprising in Czechoslovakia, they ran away again and here they are.



THE PAPERHANGER CANCELS THE PEACE.
(From the grim humour of the guerillas).

"A large group of French guerillas are standing around us and now a few Russians are joining the group. One of them, Ivan, comes from the Crimea. He ran away when a transport of prisoners passed through Slovakia. For some time he was hidden by Slovak peasants and when the fighting started he joined the guerillas. 'Our little father Stalin said: Ten Germans for one Slav,' he says. 'So it must be ten Germans for one Slav.'

“ When I took leave I mentioned to the French boys that they would go home soon. But they didn't want to hear of it. No, they said, they would go after the Germans right through to Germany, to teach them what it meant to invade other countries.”

Rather surprising is the fact, that some Hungarian anti-fascists and even some Germans have joined the guerillas. The German soldiers are, of course, Austrians and so far we haven't heard of any exception to this rule. An incident of this kind, published in the newspaper *Pravda*, is worth recording :

“ Our patrol met a German soldier, an Austrian, who wanted to come over to us. We were all surprised. When we saw him, some of our comrades put their guns into position. But others told them : ‘ Leave him alone, he cannot do any harm any more. We shall have plenty of occasions to kill Germans.’ And soon we found out that he came not only with friendly intentions, but that he also brought a present—a machine-gun. The enmity was soon forgotten, and the boys who wanted to kill him a few moments ago gave him a cigarette and lighted it for him. He spoke with a queer mixture of Russian, Czech, Slovak and Croatian and told us that more of his Austrian comrades were coming over to us.”

* * * * *

But these instances are rare. The Germans, be they soldiers or civilians, are fighting stubbornly against the forces of liberation. Even German workers have mostly refused to make a common front with the forces fighting for freedom and democracy and they have, in fact, as was the case in the industrial town of Handlová, formed their own guerilla group to fight against our forces. All this, together with the German atrocities, has only poured more oil on the fire burning in the breasts and the hearts of these peaceful people, who did not want anything but to be left alone and to develop their country for the good of all its citizens. The destruction of the Czechoslovak Republic, the terrible bloodshed which the Germans have committed in Bohemia-Moravia and all the crimes they are now committing against the Slovak people have brought this people's army into being and made it a terrible and implacable foe.

In his oath, the guerilla says :

" I swear by everything that is sacred to me, that I shall neither spare my efforts nor my life in the fight for the liberation of the Czechoslovak Republic.

" I shall revenge mercilessly all the pains and tears of our mothers and sisters, the murdered patriots, all the crimes committed by the German and Hungarian barbarians on the Czechs, Slovaks and Carpathian Ukrainians.

" I have volunteered for the ranks of the guerilla fighters and I promise to be faithful to my platoon to obey every order of my commander and to carry it out dutifully. I shall always keep all the secrets entrusted to me and I shall never betray my comrades, even if I should be put to torture. If I should betray my comrades, or if I should not fulfil the commands, may a stern punishment meet me from the hands of my comrades.

" My platoon will be my family, my comrades will be my brothers. If my comrade should be wounded, I shall help him and I shall not let him fall into the hands of the enemy. I myself shall never surrender to the enemy.

" All my thoughts and all my strength shall be from today dedicated to one aim only, to harm the enemy on every occasion, to help with all my might in the struggle of my country for freedom.

" I shall not stop in this fight until the last foreign invader is driven out from our soil, until the Czechoslovak Republic, a State of three equal Slavonic nations—the Czechs, the Slovaks and the Carpathian Ukrainians—shall be free.

" My watchword will be :

" Death to the German invaders—freedom for the nations of Czechoslovakia.

" So I swear ! "

These are not mere words. The forces of the Slovak people's army are fulfilling every word of this oath. Their fight and their blood bear witness to this.

THE MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RISING

The military significance of the Slovak rising has only become clear with the passage of time ; but in the first days of November 1944, it became evident that its importance was far more than local. It has influenced even the course of the

great war operations in south-eastern Europe, in the battle of the Balkans, of the Carpathians and of the Danube Basin.

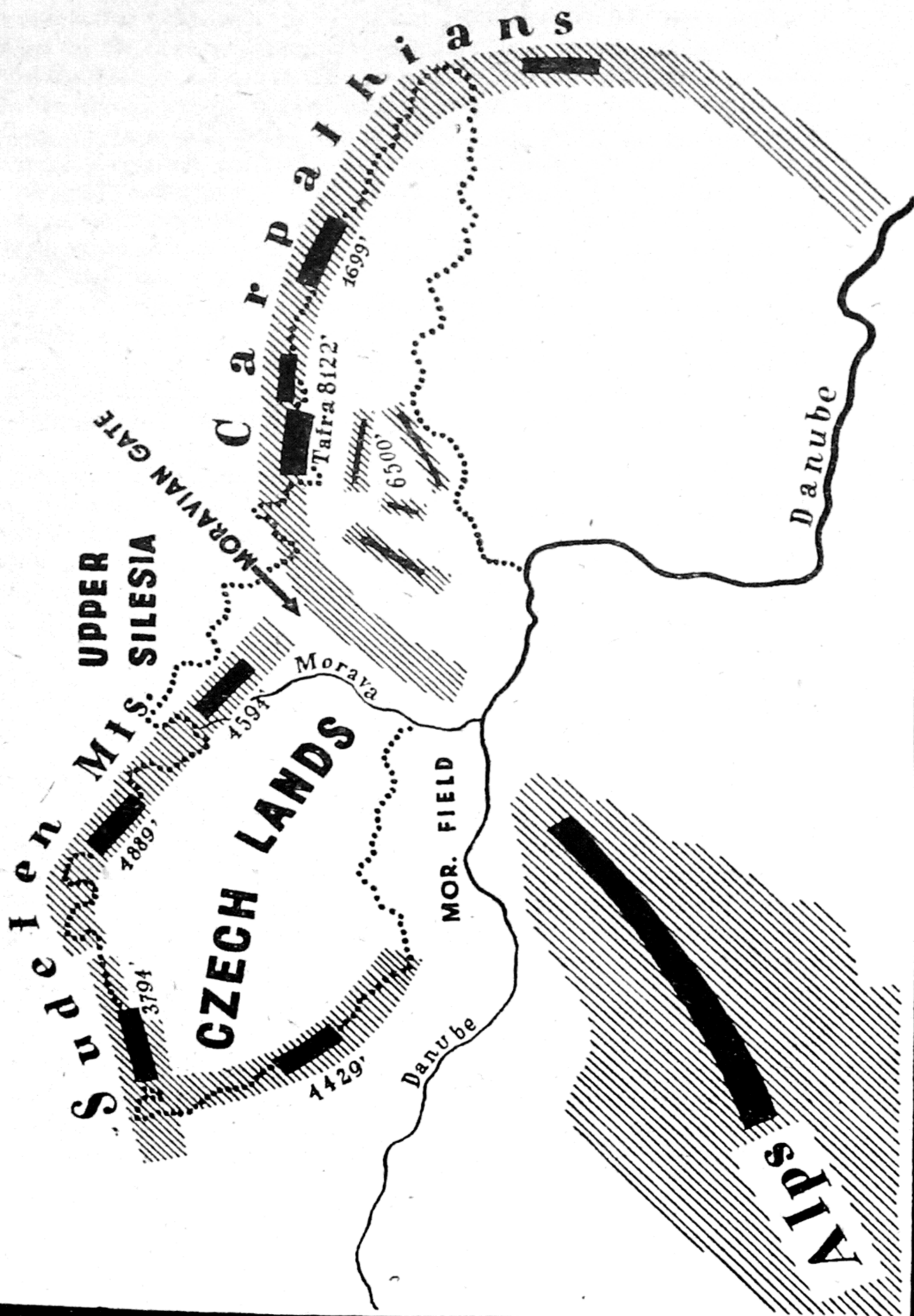
This statement may seem somewhat exaggerated, for at the beginning the rising did not divert more than 3—4 German divisions. Within two months, however, the number of German divisions fighting to suppress the rising was increased to seven. This in itself is, for the small Slovak nation, an honourable contribution towards the German defeat. But it would be inadequate to judge this contribution only by comparing the number of German divisions used in Slovakia with those defending the German fortress against the Allies in the east, west and south. The Slovak rising had indeed a much wider significance.

The true significance of the Slovak rising becomes clear only when Germany's whole military situation is taken into account—its possibilities and plans of defence against the final and decisive Allied attack.

To realise that, a short review of the recent past may be useful. At the beginning of 1943, when the Allied offensive from the west began to deal most serious blows at the German war production in the Ruhr district, the Germans had already started to transfer their war industries to the east, to a belt comprising approximately Upper Silesia and Western Poland, roughly the area on both sides of the River Oder, the Czech lands, Bohemia-Moravia, Austria with its great war industries, western Hungary, and, of course, northern Italy. At that time this location of the German war industries seemed ideal. Nowhere were the air bases of the Allies less than 700 miles distant from these centres of German war production, and thus it was possible to pump blood into the arteries of the German army without interruption.

The great Allied operations of 1944 basically changed this situation. In the west the Allies penetrated to the Siegfried Line and to the Rhine, the Red Army advanced to the Vistula and began to strike at the passes of the Carpathians and the Transylvanian Alps which form a protective shield over the Danube area, cover the approaches to the Austrian armoury and to the Czech arsenal from the south-east, and block the entrance to northern Italy from the east.

The defence of the Carpathians is therefore vital for the German war. The Slovak rising obstructed and complicated the German defence of the Carpathians and of the whole wide area of south-eastern Europe, and facilitated the penetration



of the Carpathian barrier, and in this way made an important contribution towards the shortening of the war.

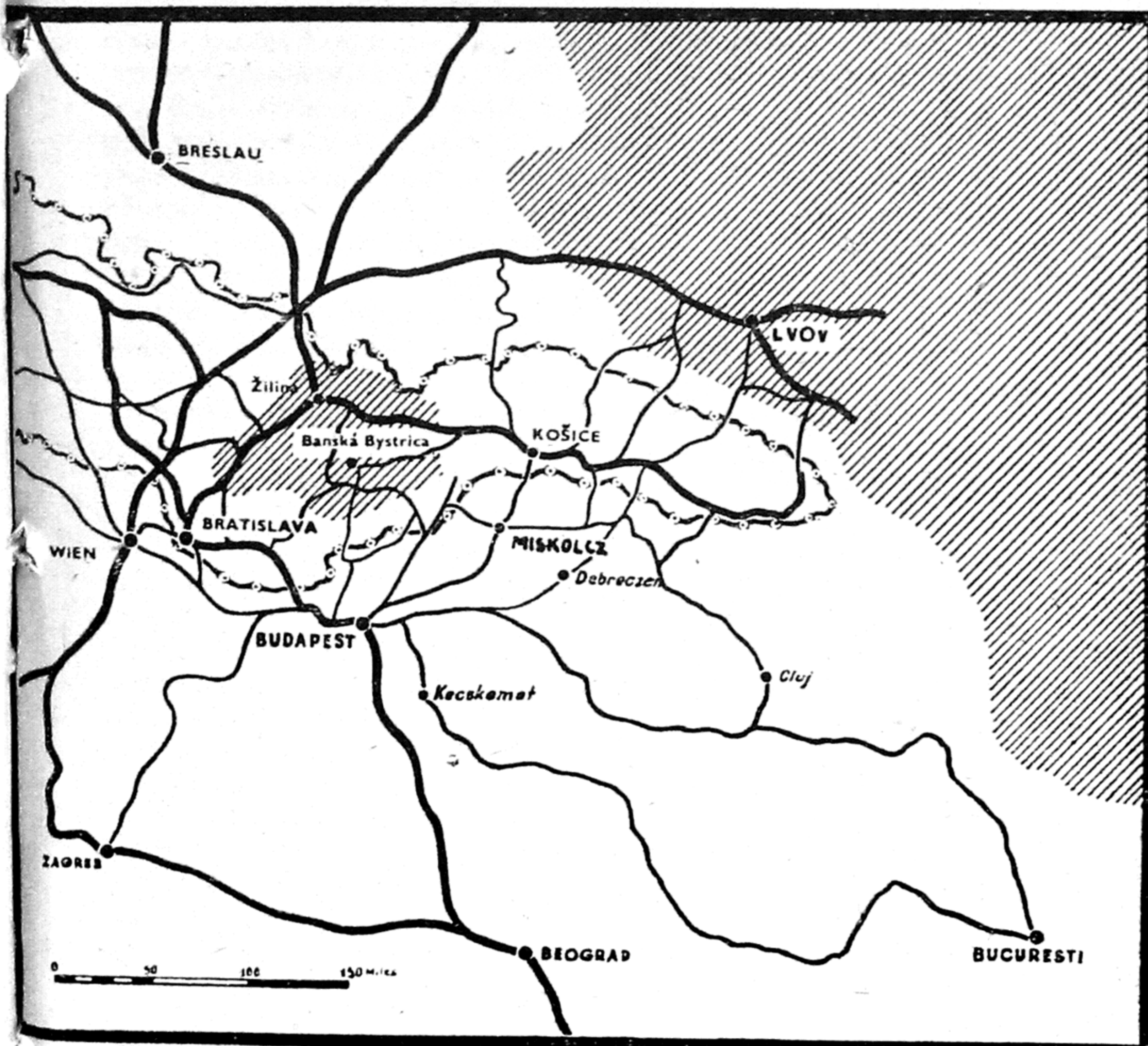
How as it that the Slovak rising so significantly influenced the great battle of south-eastern Europe when, as is well known, three big groups of the Soviet armies were attacking the Germans in that area, those under the command of Marshals Tolbukhin and Malinovsky and General Petrov, and while, furthermore, a part of Marshal Koniev's army from southern Poland, Marshal Tito's Yugoslav Peoples' Army, and later even 12 Rumanian divisions and the Bulgarian army were pressing the Germans? Against that powerful force the German and Hungarian armies were defending a front of over 450 miles long, stretching from the Carpathians to the Bosnian Mountains. And yet Slovakia played a great part in this gigantic battle.

This was made possible by Slovakia's geographical position and communications which made it suitable for defensive strategy.

Slovakia is for the most part a mountainous country, stretching along the southern fringes of the Carpathians from West to East. Its mountains form a considerable area about 170 miles long and 150 miles broad, which closes the gap between the eastern fringe of the Sudeten mountains and the Alps. Thus the entrance to the Czech lands is reduced to two comparatively narrow gateways—the Moravian gap in the north, and the gap along the Danube in the south, both of them scarcely a dozen or so miles wide. Both these gateways lead to the Moravian Field, which has been the scene of many great and decisive historic battles.

On the Moravian Field 666 years ago (in 1278), was decided the fate of the central European realm of Premysl Otakar II, the Czech King whose power extended as far as the Adriatic Sea. He was defeated and killed on the Moravian Field by the German Rudolf Habsburg. This victory laid the foundations of the power of the Habsburgs, who for six centuries were the dominating factor in Central Europe. Since then the Moravian Field has been in German hands, and with it also the strong influence that the Germans have exercised on the course of political events in Central and South-Eastern Europe. Napoleon also fought decisive battles against Austria on the Moravian Field, or near it, and these battles decided the vassal relationship of Habsburg Austria to Napoleonic France.

Slovakia then, closing as it does the way to the Czech lands from the east, compelling any attacking force to strike either through the Moravian gap or through the southern gap along the Danube, plays a most important role, and it is clear that he who dominates Slovakia has a high card in his hand in the fight for the Czech lands and the Austrian arsenal.



The Slovak mountains give excellent possibilities for defence. Every concentrated attacking force must inevitably be scattered in them, and its advance slowed down. Experience gained in the fighting in Italy for the Appenines, as well as in the battles for the Carpathians, has shown that war in the

mountains cannot be quick, that every attacking army is compelled to break up into tens and hundreds of units which have to operate independently. An ingeniously prepared and well-executed offensive which would, in the plains, lead to a break-through and an advance of tens of miles with a gain of large areas, leads in the mountains only to the capture of a village or hill, and an advance of only a few miles.

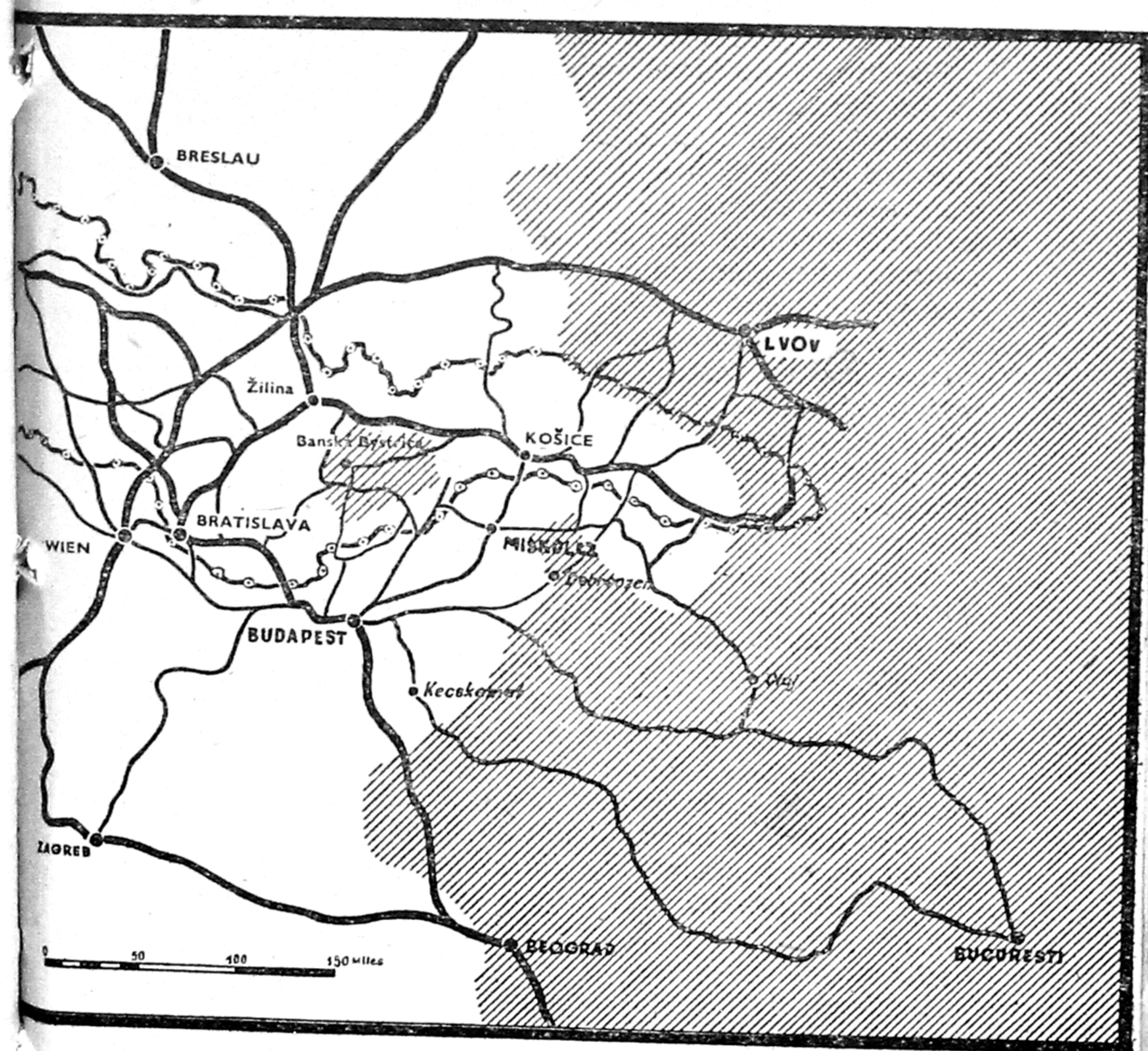
Based on the Slovak defensive bastion, the Germans would be able to fortify and defend both gateways leading to the Czech lands much better and more thoroughly ; while the loss of Slovakia would completely deprive them of this obvious defensive asset. With Slovakia in the hands of friendly forces, the Red Army would be enabled to push through the Carpathian passes into the valley of the river Morava, and thus into the rear of the German fortified positions in both the gateways leading to the Czech lands. That would obviously spell disaster to the German defence of the Czech lands. That is why it must have been of the utmost importance to the Germans to hold Slovakia if they wanted to ensure the protection of a substantial part of their war arsenal. The domination of Slovakia is therefore most essential to the German defence.

Another important aspect of the Slovak rising has been the direct influence it exercised on the course of the battle of south-eastern Europe.

At the end of August 1944, when the Slovak rising began, the Germans were able to send supplies and reinforcements to their fronts in South Eastern Europe and the Carpathians by using two railway lines running through the Carpathians from Poland, four lines running through the Carpathians from Bohemia-Moravia, and a further system of railway communications, the hubs of which are Vienna, Budapest and Bratislava.

By the rising of the patriots the Germans were cut off from the whole of the Slovak transport system at one blow. The greatest harm to the Germans was caused by the loss of the most important Slovak railway line Zilina—Kosice, which is a double-track line and runs parallel with the ridge of the Carpathians along their southern slopes ; serious, also, was the loss of the parallel line Bratislava—Bánská Bystrica—Kosice, and finally the loss of the double-track railway line Zilina—Bratislava, which connects Silesia and Budapest. This is the reason why, in the first days, the main German

effort was aimed at recapturing these lines, particularly the most important railway line leading to the east along the Carpathian slopes. In that, however, they succeeded only partially. After three weeks of fighting they were indeed able to drive the Slovak patriots from the valley through



which this railway line runs, but its tunnels and bridges were destroyed and whole sections of it remained under the fire of Czechoslovak artillery. Later on, the Slovak rising made the German situation still worse, because the Red Army seized one of the two railway lines leading through the

Carpathians from Poland, while other Soviet forces overran Rumania and Bulgaria, penetrated into the Danubian Plain, and received support from the armies of Rumania and Bulgaria. Those lines of transport which remained in German hands were then over-burdened, the more so because the river Danube towards which the Slovak territory stretches, was also threatened as a transport artery by the rising.

The loss of the Slovak transport system had a direct effect on the fighting for Northern Transylvania and the easternmost province of Czechoslovakia, called Carpathian Ukraine. The loss of the Slovak net of communications became still more serious when the Red Army was approaching Budapest and the southern frontiers of Slovakia, cutting off in its advance the communications leading from Hungary to Transylvania and to the Carpathian Ukraine. In the light of this double advance of the Red Army into the Hungarian plain—from the North and from the South East—the military importance of the Slovak rising in the battle for the Danube Basin becomes evident. At the time when the Red Army reached Debreczen and the River Tisza near Tokay, the Slovaks still held the transport system of Central Slovakia. The corridor which remained to the Germans for retreat and for supplying their troops in the eastern pocket was only about 70 miles wide. This undermined the German chances of a successful defence of Northern Transylvania and Carpathian Ukraine. The Hungarians and Germans were in acute danger of being surrounded and unable to retreat to the west. In order to prevent the annihilation of the German and Hungarian divisions in the eastern trap, the German army—in the second half of October—began an offensive against the free Slovak territory from the south-east, and simultaneously against the forces of the Red Army in the area of Debreczen, with a view to broadening the corridor and, at the eleventh hour, seizing the communication lines of Slovakia.

German statements and reports show that the Germans soon realised the great strategic importance of Slovakia, especially since the summer of 1944, when the fronts were approaching the borders of Germany. Thus, for instance, the German *Transcontinent Press* wrote on June 28th, 1944 :

“ Slovakia holds a very important position among the countries of the south-eastern area. It came to the foreground

in European transport particularly since gaining independence, and today it holds in many respects a key position, connecting the industrial areas of Central and Western Europe with the agricultural East and South East." The report went on to say that in the last five years not less than two and a half milliard Slovak crowns were expended for the building of strategic roads and railways in Slovakia, where more than 700 miles of first-class military roads had been built.

On October 20th, 1944, the Berlin newspaper *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* published an article dealing with the strategic importance of Slovakia, in which it said: "... Slovakia has an important task, which it has fulfilled so often in the past. This task is to be a defensive wall of Central Europe. In the past Slovakia was a defensive wall against the Turkish south-east, and at its ramparts the Turkish drive against Europe was halted. Slovakia has a similar task today. . . ."

From these quotations it can be seen that the Germans knew very well how important it was for them to hold Slovakia; and this explains why, at a time when for lack of forces they were losing valuable areas and towns in North Eastern France and Belgium, as well as oil-fields in Rumania, they sent a number of crack divisions against the Slovak rising, to crush it and to make Slovakia a reliable defensive bastion.

* * * * *

The significance of the Slovak rising for the liberation and future of the Czechoslovak Republic is indeed incalculable. It removed all doubts as to the right of the quisling government to speak for the Slovak nation, and it showed the real attitude of the Slovaks towards the Germans. The strength of the whole nation was mobilised against them, and the ranks of the anti-German front were augmented by tens of thousands of soldiers, partisans and saboteurs. One aim of the open warfare of the Slovak people was to prevent the Germans from carrying out an organised retreat on Slovak territory, destroying towns and villages as they went, and waging defensive battles for Germany on Slovak soil. The Germans had intended to convert Slovakia into a fortified camp, using the slave labour of the people; and at the very moment when large-scale extensions of their fortifications

should have been started the Slovak people rose and thwarted this German plan. The resources of the country were not only denied to the Germans, but they were turned against them.

The open war of the Slovaks against the Germans had a mighty echo in the other parts of Czechoslovakia, in Carpathian Ukraine and the Czech lands. The frontier between Moravia and Slovakia was closed and in Bohemia-Moravia a new wave of brutal terrorism was started. Since the beginning of the Slovak rising not a day has passed without dozens of Czech patriots being murdered by the German terrorists. Thousands of people tried to escape across the frontier into liberated Slovakia, and the tension in the Czech lands increased to the point of an explosion. The situation was similar in Carpathian Ukraine, where the Germans and Hungarians held mass executions of the patriots who rose against them.

So the rising in Slovakia became a call to fighters in other parts of the Czechoslovak Republic, thus further worsening the position on the so-called German home front.

From the repercussions the Slovak rising had on the military operations as well as on the internal situation in a part of the Third Reich (occupied Bohemia-Moravia) it becomes quite clear that it is no exaggeration to say that its significance is more than local. Not only the Slovak nation itself, the Czechs and the Carpathian Ukrainians, but all the nations of Central and South Eastern Europe, as well as all the Allies, are indebted to the Slovak patriots.

THE COURSE OF THE RISING

The resistance the Slovak people put up for many weeks aroused surprise and indignation in Germany. The German General Staff knew very well the state of the Slovak army, it knew how many soldiers and weapons it had, how many aeroplanes, tanks, guns, and what stores of ammunition were at its disposal. According to this knowledge the Germans could calculate what forces were needed to crush the Slovak rising quickly. At the end of August two battleworthy Slovak divisions were in the Carpathians with the German Army, which was awaiting the Soviet attack through the Carpathian passes. In the interior there were only garrisons, inadequately equipped and inadequately prepared for an

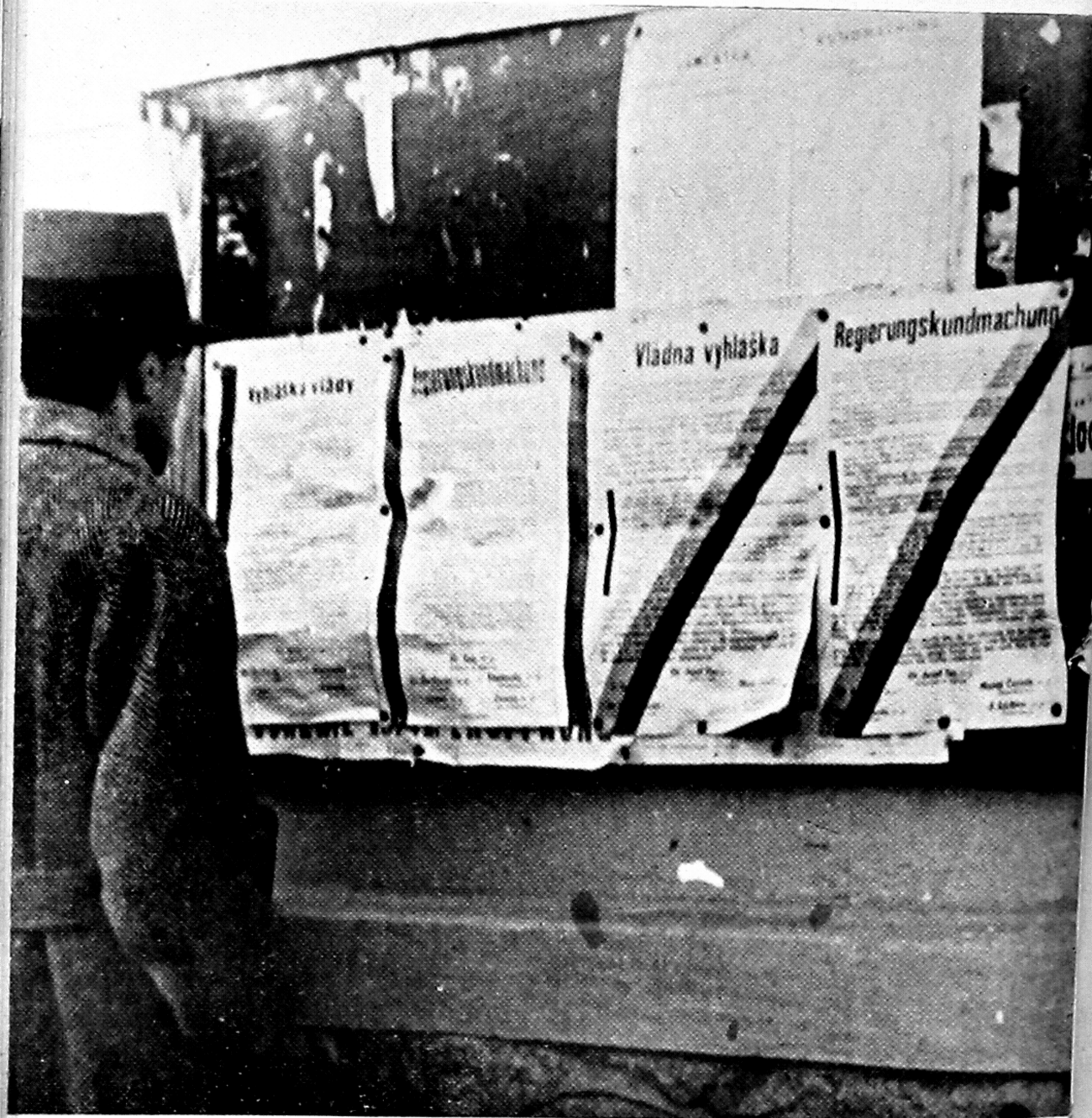
THE COUNTRY WHERE
THE GUERRILLAS
FIGHT THE GERMANS.



'Road of Freedom'
in the Tatras
mountains.



Where two
Slovak
rivers—Váh
and Orava—
meet.



THE QUISLING GOVERNMENT TRIED IN VAIN TO "PRESERVE ORDER."
Posters warning Slovak patriots.

armed clash with field forces. By an unlucky coincidence these two fully trained divisions were unable to reach districts of Central Slovakia. Furthermore, all their artillery and heavy arms were seized by the Germans, and a considerable part of these divisions had to retreat to the mountains as partisan units, without any direct connection with the liberated territory. So the Germans assumed that three or four divisions sent against the core of the Slovak revolt, the central districts of Slovakia, would be enough to crush the rising in a matter of days, if not of hours, and to restore German order in the whole of Slovak territory. Bombastic German reports to this effect were issued in the first days of the rising, announcing that the liquidation of the Slovak revolt was merely a police action and that it would be completed within 48 hours.

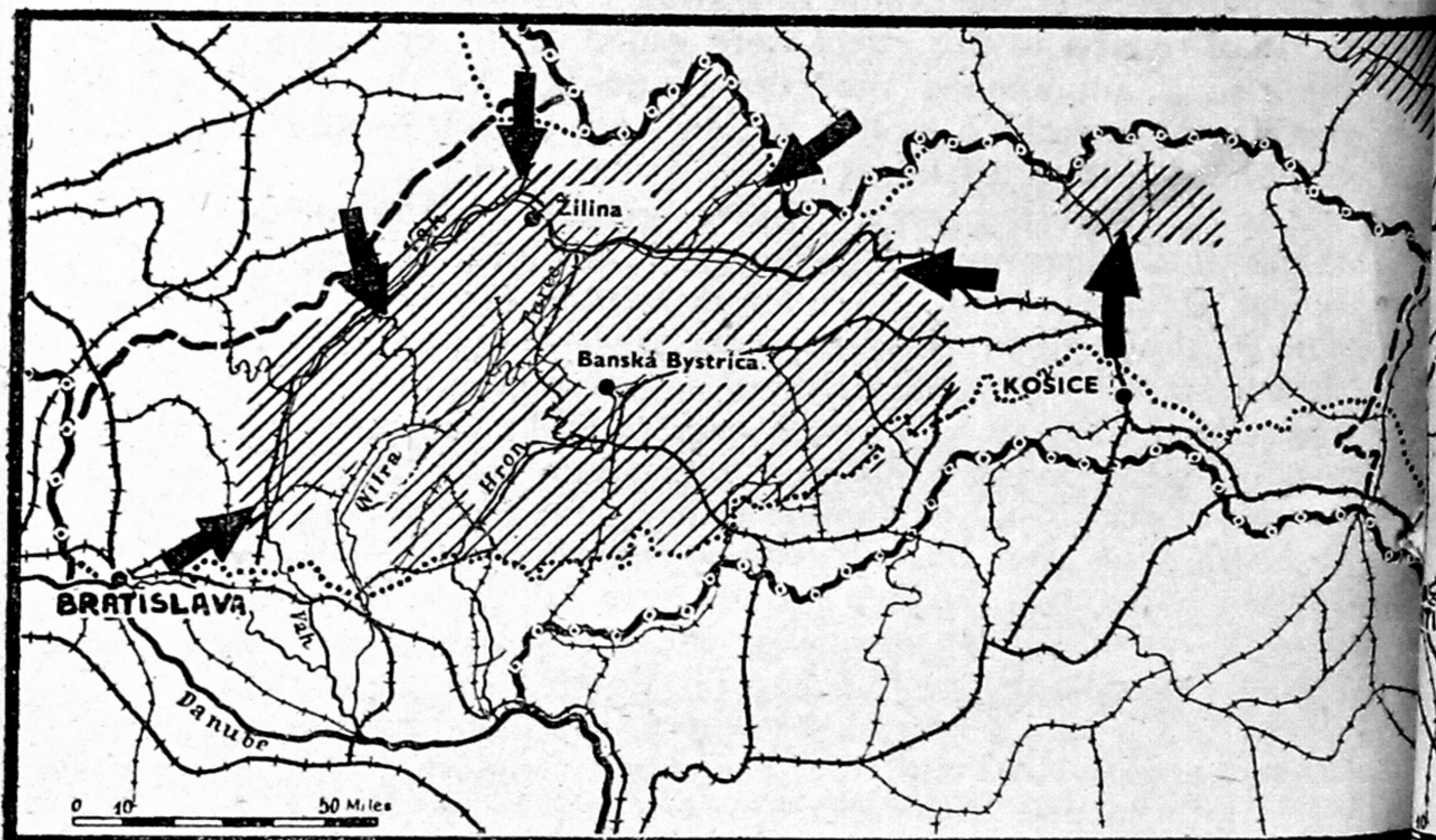
The Germans, however, were greatly disappointed—thanks to the heroism and gallantry of the Slovak people, and thanks to Soviet help by air, a few days after the rising started. This help was given willingly, as far as weather and technical difficulties over a mountainous country permitted. The Germans had to make a much greater effort than they had originally supposed, and even then they were unable to crush the rising and to dominate the whole of Slovakia.

At the time when Slovakia rose in resistance to the German invasion, the main Allied fronts were still very far from Slovak territory. In the east the Red Army was only approaching Bucharest and had not entered the Carpathian passes at a single place. Everywhere they stood only at the foot of the Carpathians, and the mighty mountain barrier, nowhere less than 50 miles deep, was still before them. In the west the British had just reached the Somme, the battle near Paris was still going on, and the Allied advance in North-Eastern France and towards the Belgian frontier was beginning to develop. In the south the Allies had crossed the river Arno and were approaching the Gothic Line. The Baltic countries were still almost entirely in German hands, the front was on the river Narev and 80 miles from the Gulf of Riga. Finland and Bulgaria were still Hitler's allies.

The Slovak patriots, then, could not expect a link-up with any of the great Allied armies in the near future. They knew that they would have to fight alone for a long time, relying mostly on their own forces and on whatever help could reach them by air from the east or south ; they knew that they

had before them very difficult weeks, during which their ability to hold out would be subjected to very heavy pressure.

The armed forces of Slovakia were comparatively small, because the two most valuable and fully-armed divisions remained surrounded by the German army in the Carpathians. In the hinterland there were relatively few weapons, nor was there any great prospect of supplying the fighting units with the necessary weapons and ammunition. It soon became evident that the greatest weakness of fighting Slovakia was lack of munitions and medicaments.

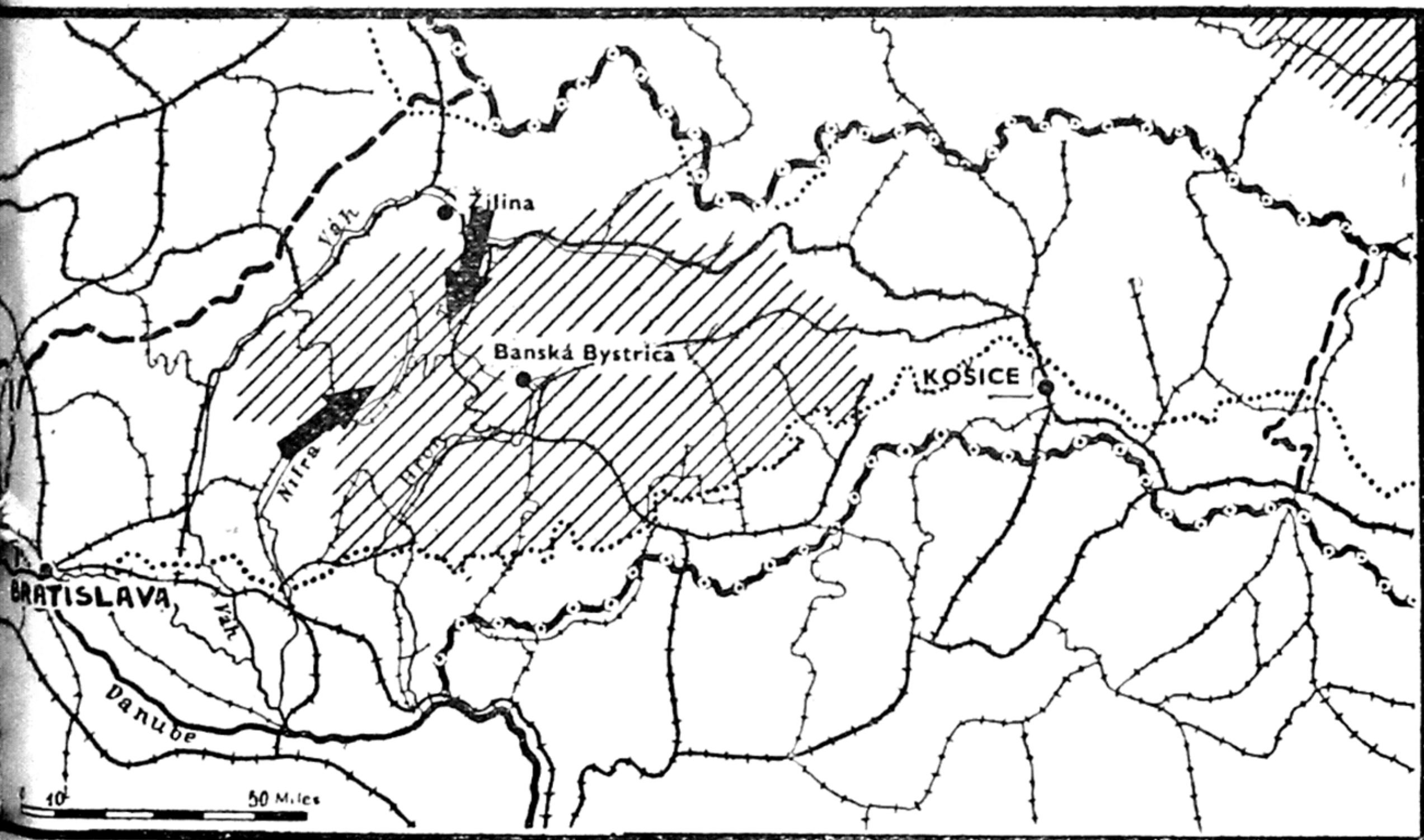


In spite of these drawbacks, which were obvious right from the beginning, practically the whole of Slovakia identified herself with the Slovak National Council, the organisers of the rising, and so did all the military garrisons but one—that of the town of Nitra. Thus, immediately on the first day the main part of Slovak territory was in the hands of the patriots fighting against the Germans under the authority of the Slovak National Council, which at once organised the administration and the fronts.

The western part of Slovakia had for some years already been occupied by the Germans, who had training camps and airfields there. Now German aircraft immediately took off

from these airfields, and in the first days they let loose all their fury over free Slovak territory, which free Slovakia, owing to lack of anti-aircraft weapons, found it hard to counter. Parts of southern and eastern Slovakia, under German pressure, had been ceded to the Hungarians in 1939 to induce them to help Germany in the war preparations in the Balkans. However, in the remaining Slovak territory an overwhelming majority of the people turned their backs on the quisling Government in Bratislava and supported the Slovak National Council.

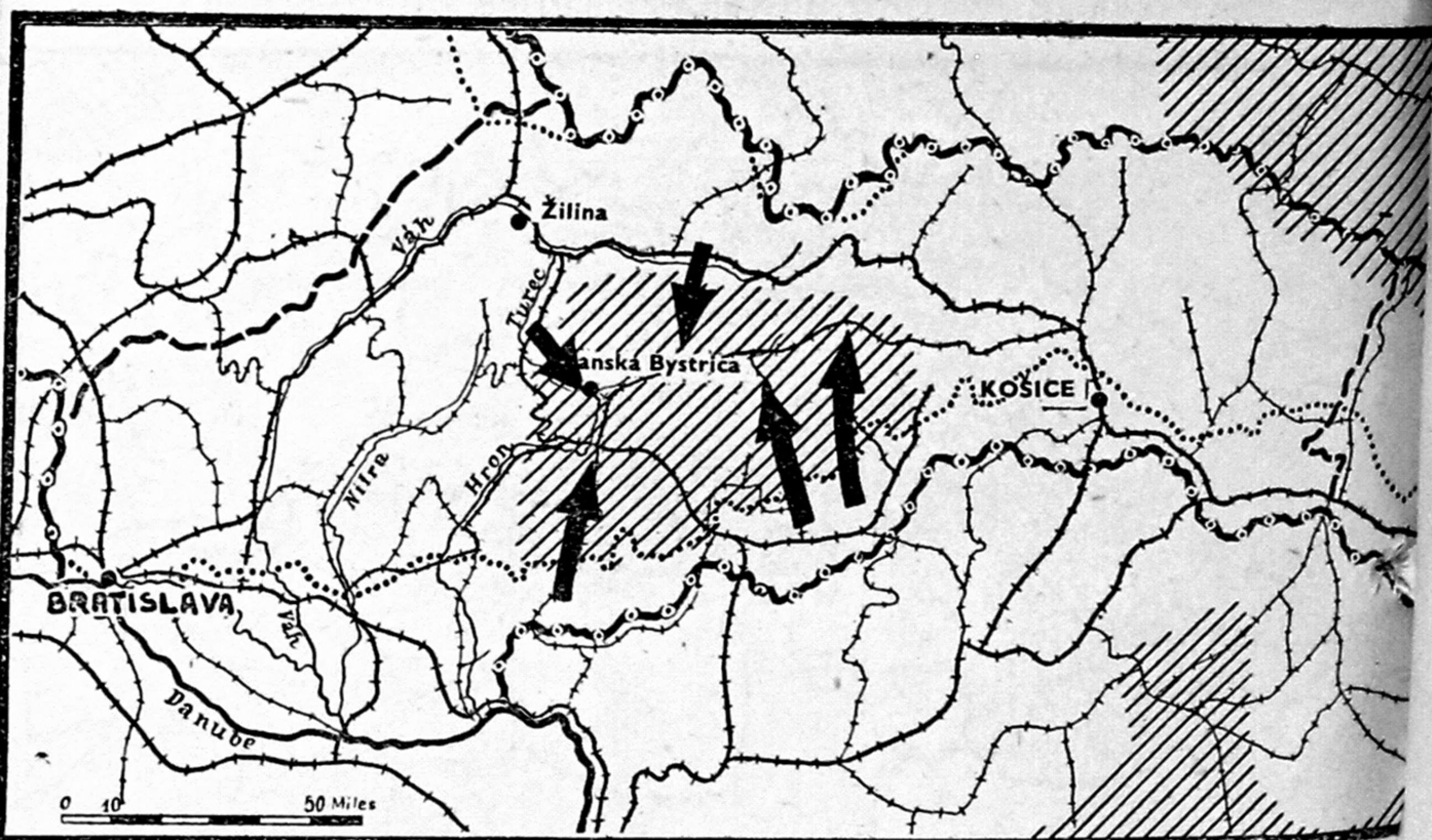
The Germans marched into Slovakia from the west and



north—from those territories they had previously occupied—through the Vlára and Jablunka passes from the so-called Protectorate Bohemia-Moravia and from Poland. A few days later the German advance started also from the east. The Slovak-Hungarian border, created by the German Diktat of 1939, was, except for a few incidents, comparatively quiet. The Hungarians did not take part in the German occupation, nor did the German army at that time advance across their frontier, although since Spring 1944 Hungary had been occupied by the Germans.

The main German drive started in the west, and its aim

was to free the two main Slovak communication arteries, the double-track strategic line Zilina-Kosice, and the line Zilina-Bratislava. The struggle for the railway junction of Zilina lasted almost a fortnight, although the Germans sent a crack motorised S.S. division to capture it. Only after three weeks of fighting did they succeed in taking the valley through which the Zilina-Kosice line runs, and in driving the Slovak patriot units back into the mountains. But on the 26th September the Slovak units captured Kráľova Lehota—50 miles east of Zilina—and thus again severed this line.



In order to secure the Zilina-Bratislava railway the Germans began to carry out a pincer movement from the northern valley of the Turec to the south, and from the southern valley of the Nitra to the north, so as to surround the Czechoslovak units holding out in the mountains along the railway and the highway Zilina-Bratislava. But only at the end of the fifth week of fighting were they successful. When the encircling forces had nearly closed the ring the regular Czechoslovak units were withdrawn to the east to the slopes of the Fatra range, and behind the German lines only partisan units were left to continue their disruptive activities.

Not until the beginning of October—in the sixth week of

the campaign—were the Germans able to open an attack against the centre of the free territory, the town of Banská Bystrica. Most of the fighting was now concentrated on the south-western fringe of the free territory, from where it is 20 miles to Banská Bystrica in a direct line across the mountains. This offensive failed after three weeks. The Germans did indeed make small gains in the south-western parts of the free territory, but they did not break through the main defensive position of the Slovak army.

On the 20th October the Germans faced a desperate situation in the Danube plain, when their army was defeated in a battle lasting many days south of Debreczen, and when Marshal Malinovsky's divisions moved north to the Tisa and to the southern frontier of Slovakia. On the 21st October Debreczen fell and the Red Army was speedily approaching free Slovak territory from the south. From the 18th October onwards, General Petrov's divisions were advancing through six Carpathian passes from north to south into the Danube basin. The corridor between the south-eastern border of the liberated Slovak territory and the Red Army, through which the German forces could be reinforced or escape, was narrowed to 70 miles between the south-eastern border of the liberated Slovak territory and the Red Army front. The danger to the Germans was assuming alarming proportions. In this situation, on the 22nd October, they started a decisive offensive from Hungarian territory, with fresh and considerably larger forces than those they used in preceding actions, against the south and south-eastern flanks of liberated Slovakia, in order to open a way of retreat to the west. Seven German divisions were identified as having taken part in this attack, three of them being S.S. armoured divisions, "Das Reich," "Deutschland" and "Prinz Eugen." Strong tank and motorised columns, with powerful air support, penetrated the comparatively weak defensive position on sectors that had been quiet for two months, and finally, after a long struggle, they broke through the Slovak front. In five days the Germans, with several times the number of their opponents, advanced some 20 to 30 miles into the liberated territory, and on the 27th October, on the eve of the Czechoslovak Day of Independence, they entered the administrative centre of free Slovakia, Banská Bystrica.

After two months of fighting the cohesive military front of free Slovakia was indeed broken, but this was not the end of





WARSZAWA

LVOV

BUCURESTI

the Slovak resistance. The military units withdrew from the valleys to the mountains, which are in places as much as 7,000 feet high.

The Germans drove the Slovak army of liberation from the Slovak lines of communication, but this did not mean that the Germans recovered these lines for their own transport. The railways in particular remained unusable for the Germans for a long time. The Slovak patriots had blocked the tunnels, broken the tracks, destroyed whole sections of the line, demolished the embankments. The only line in Slovakia the Germans could use in November was the railway line between Zilina and Bratislava which, by the way, goes through only one tunnel and over only two bridges.

From the end of October the war in Slovakia has been a guerilla war, similar to that in Yugoslavia. The morale of the fighting patriots remained unbroken in spite of severe trials, and their belief in victory unshaken. On the day when the Germans dealt the Slovaks the heaviest blow and captured their administrative centre, the commander of the fighting armies in Slovakia sent the following telegram to the Czechoslovak Government in London: "The Slovak people and army are fighting with enthusiasm for the Czechoslovak Republic, even in the knowledge of the complete material superiority of the enemy. They are fighting for every yard of liberated soil and are paying with a heavy toll of blood."

And three days later the broadcast of the quisling Slovak Government itself had to admit that the fighting went on. It did so in these words: "The Czecho-Bolshevik units which have escaped to inaccessible mountains are threatening from there the renewal of the peaceful life of our villages and towns."

At the end of October the Germans seized the valleys through which run the communications between the front and the German hinterland. But by that time the Red Army had already crossed the Carpathians, and were only 60 miles from Budapest and on the border of Slovakia, having freed the whole of Carpathian Ukraine; it was, in fact, 80 miles to the south-east of the mountain range, in which the scattered units of a heroic army were holding out, an army which for two months had fought and resisted greatly superior forces.

The account of the first two months of the Slovak rising leads us to the conclusion that it fulfilled an important military

task and made a remarkable contribution towards the hastening of the German defeat.

THE FIGHTING CONTINUES

ON October 27th, 1944, the eve of the Czechoslovak Day of Independence, the German High Command announced that the rising in Slovakia was "in the process of collapsing."

In the preceding chapter we have described what had actually happened. We have shown how, after arduous and bitter fighting which lasted for many weeks, seven German Divisions were sent against the numerically as well as materially weaker Czechoslovak forces and pushed their way into the administrative centre of free Slovakia, compelling the Czechoslovak forces to retreat into the mountains.

After the occupation of France by the Germans, General de Gaulle said : " France has lost a battle, but it hasn't lost the war." The same is true of the Czechoslovak soldiers and patriots who are fighting today in the mountains, hills and forests of Slovakia, maintaining large centres of resistance, holding out in the mountain fastnesses, sweeping down into the valleys to harass the Germans, to damage their lines of communication, to kill the invaders.

We have shown the military significance of the rising, which made it necessary for the Germans to use considerable forces against fighting Slovakia. But as the struggle continues the network of the Slovak railways will be of little use to the Germans, while other communications will be constantly harassed by the guerillas, who are active everywhere. Their ranks have swelled considerably, for, although the enemy succeeded in capturing a certain number of men of the regular army, the remaining units have joined the guerillas and are continuing the warfare with them. In spite of having won a battle, the Germans cannot look upon the Slovak territory as a secure hinterland. It will, in fact, becoming increasingly insecure as the Soviet armies approach, compelling the Germans either to stand and fight or to retreat. In either case they will face a difficult situation in their rear in Slovakia, as well as in the other parts of the Czechoslovak Republic, Bohemia and Moravia, which were greatly stimulated by the rising of the Slovaks.

The military effect of the rising is closely interwoven with its political aspect. The Slovaks, in their rising, were stimulated by the suffering of the Czechs and by the desire to come to their aid after their own liberation in this decisive moment of the war. For the Czechs, the rising in Slovakia was like a clarion-call, urging them to stand by. And both nations have been stimulated by the resounding Allied victories in the east and west, which have shown them that the hour of the resurrection of free Czechoslovakia is not far away.

The political results of the rising are far-reaching. For five years the quisling Government of Bratislava has been at pains to impress upon the public opinion of the world the fact that the Slovaks have never been happier than under German tutelage in their so-called independent state. Millions of words have been said and printed in Slovakia to the effect that the Slovaks do not want to have anything to do with the Czechs, and that they loathe to be reminded of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Thousands of men, fighting in the ranks of the Czechoslovak army abroad, have exposed this lie. Now, at the end of August, 1944, the entire people of Slovakia rose against their quisling Government. Within a few hours the traitors of Bratislava became a government without an army. The Czechoslovak Republic was not only proclaimed on the very first day of the rising, but it was fought for and it is being fought for. If any proof was needed that the Slovak people see their future only within the Czechoslovak Republic, it has been given by their heroic deeds. Those who knew the Slovak people well, never doubted them.

Another important political result lies in the fact that the experiment in self-administration undertaken by the Slovak National Council was fully successful. This body, which took over the administration of the liberated parts immediately after the outbreak of the rising, succeeded in creating an efficient administration under most difficult circumstances. While bitter war was raging on the Slovak soil a fair distribution of food was secured, trains were running and factories were working, in short, the whole machinery of a civilised state, purged of quislings and traitors, was functioning smoothly. Even the schools were opened with only a few days delay, after the summer vacation. And in one Slovak town a literary weekly began to appear, while heavy

guns were firing in the nearby front line. There is little doubt that the Slovak National Council will resume its role when the territory is liberated by the Red Army together with the Czechoslovak forces and the guerillas. The efficient and smooth change-over from the quisling rule to the administration of a free community will be an example of an immediate post-war administration to other parts of Czechoslovakia, still awaiting their liberation.

It should be remembered that there was no chaos and no disorder in the areas liberated by force of arms and still under the threat of war. This shows that the Czechoslovak people are a people of common-sense, determined to put their house in order in the quickest possible way and to return to the normal, civilised life ; it shows that they are a hard-working, peace-loving nation, whose only aim is to make their country a well-run home, shared equally by all.

For the time being the war still continues and Slovakia fights on. This country is not a secure hinterland for the Germans who, at the time of writing, are retreating as the Red Army advances from the south as well as from the north-east. The Germans wanted to make Slovakia their rampart, their battlefield, sacrificing it in the defence of Germany. Czechoslovak forces and Slovak patriots made it a battlefield of their own free will, a field of battle for their liberation.

The beautiful country under the Carpathians and the Tatra mountains is paying a heavy price. Its villages have been razed to the ground or burnt by the Germans. Its men, women and even children have died or are suffering the same cruelties the Germans have inflicted upon the unhappy peoples of Russia, Poland and other occupied countries. Young and old men fell in battle, many—including their commanders, Generals Viest and Golian—have been captured by the enemy and, today, nothing is known of their fate.

The people suffer, but they do not complain and they go on fighting, for they know that liberty must be paid for in blood.

By fighting, dying and suffering for their liberty they have fought, died and suffered for the liberty of others, as all free peoples of the whole world have done in these fateful years. They are fighting not only to secure their freedom in a liberated Czechoslovakia, but also for a future world which will make it impossible for any nation to subjugate a weaker

neighbour by brute force ; they are fighting for a future world in which the prophetic words of their great poet Kollár would come true :

He is not worthy of freedom, who does not cherish the freedom of others.

* * *

Since this booklet was written the Red army has crossed the borders of Slovakia from the North, the East and the South. Together with the Czechoslovak army corps and with the help of the Slovak guerillas it has liberated many Czechoslovak towns and villages in Slovakia.

The rising of the Slovak people and the Czechoslovak army in Slovakia has not been in vain. They remained victorious, for, even after their retreat into the mountains, they fought on . . .



ALLAMA IQBAL LIBRARY



6087

P
PUBLISHERS

Price **2/6** net

